THE LABOR PARTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A SOCIALIST CANADA
3rd in the series of 4 talks, by Ross Dowson (1971)

"The nature of Marxists' relationship to the mass labor party in Canada"

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(Introduction by Jim Mitchell) This is the third in a series on the Canadian labor party *(experience)* and the relationships of Marxists to it. And then we will break at 8:30 and divide into three seminar discussion groups as we have done for the past several weeks, and at that time, for any of you who are not assigned already, I will give you an assignment. Here is Ross Dowson.

*(Ross Dowson speaking:)*Well comrades, I will make some preliminary comments because there are some new persons coming into the class, and its not easy just to fit into it. I'd like to say a few words first, about what we are talking about is in essence the building of the revolutionary vanguard party in this country, and the challenges and problems that other formations coming onto the arena created for this process. We as revolutionary socialists trace our beginnings with the founding of the Communist Party in 1921. We don't come from the CCF; we don't come from the New Democratic Party. They're part of the broad course of radicalization of the workers, but the movement which we are in the process of building sees its beginnings in the founding of the Communist Party of Canada in 1921, which was the first serious attempt to form a revolutionary vanguard party.

And what we are studying in this series of classes, is the challenge that other formations created, or the opportunities that they created for the building of the revolutionary vanguard party. In an earlier class, we talked about how the revolutionary socialists don't come to the labor movement of their own choosing, but to a labor movement that's already structured, that's formed – and *(in)* this class we're going to talk about the New Democratic Party and how the revolutionary socialists saw this development. Now in the previous class, which was *(on)* the development of the CCF, I tried to develop a couple of basic concepts, one of which was that the CCF was a hindrance to the development of the revolutionary vanguard party and therefore the proletarian revolution in this country. It was a reformist diversion, which I speculated could have been blocked by a serious revolutionary socialist vanguard – could have been blocked – that it itself constituted a diversion. However, this party evolved into a labor party formation, and therefore ceased to have that completely diversionary character that it had in its early formative period.

As matter of fact, in 1943 as I pointed out, this party became – started to take on the form of a labor party, it started to change its class character and its class base, around 1943 when it was endorsed by the Canadian Congress of Labour which was one of the two main trade union centres in this country. And then in 1948 it did change its electoral base. We were able to weigh the fact that this party, originating as an agrarian protest and populist movement, gradually, through a period of experiences, by 1948 became what you would have to say was a labor party, in that it took on a new social base in Canadian politics. In 1948 it reached down and started to make real rooted connections, particularly in the East here, in the centers of the industrial proletariat – in Oshawa, in Windsor, in Hamilton, and of course in Toronto, which was the key area.

Now as this party became a labor party, took on the character of a labor party with a mass labor base, the relative weight of the revolutionary vanguard continued to deteriorate – the revolutionary socialist cadre – its weight in relation to the development of a mass labor party formation became relatively less – not less significant, its significance remained, it's tasks remained, but its relative weight became less.

And so it was required of the revolutionary socialists – whatever its organization form was at those specific times – it became necessary for them to take a strategic orientation to this mass labor party formation. It could no longer operate as if here was a revolutionary vanguard going about its tasks, attempting to attract cadre, testing its program, involving itself in mayoralty campaigns like we did, etc., it could no longer just do

those things, but pivotal to its growth, and to its development – its political development, (it) retained *(in view–ed.)* this labor party formation. It could no longer see itself, could no longer consider developing itself outside of taking a strategic orientation to this formation in this period that I am talking about, (to) the CCF.

And the position that the revolutionary socialists developed in this period*,(toward)* the CCF, was one of unconditional support to the CCF, with intensive fraction work in the CCF, and its work having a no-split character. Now that's a very condensed concept, but that's in essence what our position was. We supported the CCF, it wasn't our party – we didn't confuse anybody – we didn't tell anybody that the CCF is the party that is going to make the revolution in this country. We never pandered to any prejudices or hopes that anybody might have had that the CCF could make the revolution in this country, we knew this party could not make it – it was a reformist party, a parliamentarist party – not a revolutionary class struggle formation. But we gave it unconditional support.

We said it is necessary for workers to support this party, to vote for it, to be actively involved in it; without laying terms and conditions. For instance, when the CCF presented a constituency association candidate, we didn't come along and say well, that candidate is no good, he might be – might have been in some occasions an adviser to some company – there were cases where the sometimes candidates who were very questionable, who couldn't be called in any way, shape or form, labor – but we didn't say well we wouldn't support that candidate because that candidate is no good, and we're for this candidate because that candidate is a better candidate – we didn't lay any terms and conditions – *(and more)* we didn't say we're not supporting the CCF because the CCF is supporting the war in Korea, which is a criminal act against the cause of Korean revolutionaries – *(in violation against)* not only the popular struggle in the colonial world, but also a crime against the socialist revolution in this country. We didn't say you've got to repudiate that or we won't support you. It was not possible for us to lay down those conditions, and so there were no conditions made by us, as regard to this or that specific question.

We said, we support the CCF as a general phenomenon. It represents a break from capitalist politics, and it's progressive, and we lay no conditions down. But what we did was, we carried on intense fraction work within this movement. We suggested that socialists should join the CCF, and work within the CCF, and we said you shouldn't prepare to make any split. You shouldn't be carrying on your work in such a way that you would say ah, now, at that at this particular junction you must make a split and

form some new formation. We had what I would say was a "non-split" perspective. The revolutionary socialists in that period were oriented *(towards)* work in the NDP-CCF, for CCF electoral victory, in an intensive fraction basis, trying to find persons within the CCF who had a socialist understanding, who understood some of the problems of the class struggle, and who could come together, and build and increase the strength of the cadre of the revolutionary vanguard. We said that for the class as whole, the CCF –and then we had to add on, to the NDP – represents a progressive and an important step forward in their political development – that's generally a summary of it.

Now the last class ended with "The fight for a socialist CCF" and "The CCF stalemated." I talked about the Winnipeg *(Declaration)* – the dumping of the Regina Manifesto, which was the founding position of the party in 1933, and which as you will recall from my reading of some of it, was quite radical-sounding – it was committed to eradicating wars*, (and while it was—ed.)* designed to make the world safe for capitalism; it was *(also)* committed to a socialist, a fundamental socialist change; and then as you recall, in 1956, the party adopted what was called the "Winnipeg Declaration" which was quite the opposite.

Now around 1948, just as the party took on a working-class base, the party started to swing futher to the right, and it culminated in 1956 with the adoption of the Winnipeg Declaration. Now just a year before the adoption of the Winnipeg Declaration, there was the merger of the two main bodies of the organized labor movements in this country, the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour – they formed then the Canadian Labour Congress, in 1956. And the leading body of the CLC in '57 laid the basis for a joint political action committee, which would bring together the two bodies completely in joint political action. It was subsequently set up by the CLC at its 1958 Convention and renamed the "National Committee for a New Party." So we now see the process towards the building of a new party. And this body projected a whole series of seminars, forums, etc. addressed primarily, as the resolution said – it was assumed that CCFers were all going to go for the New Democratic Party development – it was addressed to professional people and other liberally-minded persons, to prepare the launching of a new party in July 1961.

I think we could say that the rightward drift of the party, of the CCF, in the fifties, brought it closer into line particularly with the TLC elements, those elements in the trade union movement who come from the predominantly craft unions, and made possible the degeneration of the CCF – its adaptation to increasing pressure, in this period of McCarthyism, made

it more possible for *(these)* harmonious *(class)* relations to be worked out – that's an incidental observation.

The leadership's concept of an all-inclusive New Party vs. our concept of a class party

So we are approaching the formation of a new party – this new party which was supposed to add to it, new forces, professional people, liberally-minded people, and launch a formation which is going to play a more effective role, which was going to transcend where the CCF got to. Now of course this process was followed very closely by the revolutionary socialists, and tonight I'm going to bring to your attention various analyses and comments that were made in the press of the revolutionary socialists at that time, *Workers Vanguard*. We'll be able to follow some of the developments. And the first point I want to bring *(to your attention)* was our first response to this development, which was to some considerable degree taking place behind the backs of the workers, in the CLC, and the TCL and the CCF. Nobody really knew much about what was going on. But following the convention in 1958 of the CLC where delegates adopted a political action resolution, it did not endorse the CCF. You see, up until then the Canadian Congress of Labour always endorsed the CCF. Suddenly it no longer endorsed the CCF – this was considered a big set-back by persons who had been actively involved in the fight for a labor party and the endorsation of the CCF by the Canadian Congress of Labour. When the CLC convention took place it didn't endorse the CCF, but it projected a new path.

So in the press, the *Workers Vanguard*, we tried to make some comments on what this was, what was happening – and it was speculative, because we really didn't know what was happening – we weren't privy to the inner councils, the inner circles of the either CCF leadership, or the CLC. So Mr. Coldwell made some comments – he hailed the CLC position – here he is, head of the CCF, and he hailed the fact that the CLC did not endorse the CCF, but projected a new path for political action, as a great new step forward – as a new attempt to bring realism into the Canadian political contest. And he made an approving comment. The convention did not envisage a political movement on a narrow class basis, or one which would be merely a subsidiary of organized labor, and he expressed confidence that the new organization would adopt a philosophy not narrowly farm, labor or representing any sectional interest. You can imagine what (*concern-ed*.) a statement like this would cause to anybody who was involved in the fight to build the CCF or a political instrument of the organized labor movement – here is the leader of the CCF hailing a

development which he says is not going to be a labor party formation, not going to be "narrowly partisan" – to use his words – if you hear them again you'll *(know)* that it's not going to be a party that will *(have a)* "narrow, class basis" – one that will be merely a subsidiary of organized labor – he's talking in terms of some kind of non-class, all-inclusive political movement, which of course is the common change of the Liberal Party.

That's what the Liberal Party pretends to be. Although we know it's a party of the big bourgeoisie, it doesn't appear as such – it certainly doesn't talk as such; that's hidden. That's what the reality is, but it attempts to appear as a party that is an all-inclusive party, that rejects narrow, class-bias concepts, etc. So Mr. Coldwell's statement, of course, couldn't help but cause great unease among socialists, CCFers, various stripes of radicals, or anybody with any concept of a labor party. As a matter of fact he went on further to say that he hoped this new political formation would be attractive to the progressive minority of the Liberal and Conservative parties – it was oriented to cut into the Liberal and Conservative parties. It may surprise you that he talked about the Conservative Party, because for a long time and now – now – everybody in the broad labor left spectrum sees the Liberal Party as the main opponent. But there was a period when the CCF leadership thought that it was possible that the bourgeoisie would coalesce around the Tory party (as) the Tory party underwent a revival under Mr. Diefenbaker when it opposed the Bomarc missiles on Canadian soil, and the Liberal Party was the party which was projected as being broken up. But at any rate Mr. Coldwell said that *(the New Party)* will appeal to the progressive minority in the Liberal and Conservative parties – "they will find their proper place in this New Party" – a party without a political program, of course.

There were other views put forward by other persons, but they were generally of the same character. And then we made some comments about this. We said "what will come out of it is yet to be decided – out of this new projection. It can mean a broad, genuine farmer-labor party on the forward march to a farmer-labor government – a party of sectional interests," that's what we said such a party is – "an anti-capitalist party, a class party, a party of those who work in society, a party of the overwhelming majority, the working farmer and the wage laborer. It can mean many other things, but this is the most likely variant." So we were speculating about what was happening here, behind the backs of the Left. And we said *(that)* it's quite probable that what's in the hopper now is a new labor party formation which cannot help but take on a class character.

The NDP born in the struggle against a coast-to-coast anti-labor drive

Now in order to have that assurance, we talked about what was happening in Canada – not what these people were thinking – that's another matter. What some persons think, which you'd think was to some degree a reflection of the reality, is sometimes quite different from what the reality is. As they were talking about this new party which was going to be attractive to small-L liberals and small-C conservatives, things were happening in Canada – rather important things. And we went on – I didn't read it all, I'll just finish it now – we said it can mean many things, but this is the most likely variant – this would be in the line with unfolding developments. With rising unemployment – there was a big wave of unemployment at that time, and impending class struggles both here and abroad, we were on the edge of a new wave of radicalization. This is what we were saying, back in – what was the date? '58? We were saying that in '58 there was a new ferment taking place in Canada, a new wave of radicalization. There would be many problems to surmount, above all to require the re-activization of the political educational committees in the unions – their being placed on a permanent footing, and their becoming involved in the day-to-day political life of the country in the interests of the working people. And it would require the hammering out of a fighting political program and a leadership to implement that program.

Now what was happening in Canada at that time was the Murdochville Strike, one of the most sharp class battles in Canadian labor history, involving an important sector of Quebec workers. There was also the Lever Brothers strike which was an important strike that was smashed in the Toronto area, and was quite a shocking experience for radicals in the Toronto area – to see an important local get driven into the ground – probably the first important defeat that I can recall in this period, of the labor movement in the Toronto area. There was also a massive anti-labor drive developing across Canada, primarily being carried by the provincial governments. I remember going into one of these *(CCF—ed.)* conventions; I'm not sure which one it was, I think it was in Regina. It was prior to the convention – the unions got together – the B.C. unions were barred from participating in the work of the CCF. A law had been passed by the Bennett government that prohibited them from using funds of the union rank and file for political purposes. So what they had was, before the convention of the CCF, all the unions came in for a preliminary conference, where they would discuss things. This was a device the union movement promoted in order to get around the problem of financing delegates from the unions to the CCF convention. So they pretended it was a preliminary conference of the labor movement on the very eve of the CCF convention.

So I attended this conference, a preliminary conference of the organized labor leadership in this country. And it was quite a shocking experience, even for me, because I heard them talking all peace and harmony, you know – projecting you know, non-class concepts—and then one after another, *(in a)* very seriatim *(manner)*, various heads of the federations of labor got up, one from Newfoundland, right over to B.C., and they told the story about what was happening in the organized labor movement. Well the story was very short and curt and was that it was a complete stalemate – the labor movement was not making any progress, as a matter of fact, it was being pushed back, right across the country, by a cross-country anti-labor drive. Perhaps the most dramatic one soon flared up to everyone's attention, and that was in Newfoundland, where the Woodworkers, one of the most powerful unions in Canada, launched a drive to organize some of the most exploited workers in this country. They found a big response among the Newfoundland workers, and there was a violent confrontation. *(Provincial Premier)* Mr. Smallwood who is taken now as somewhat of a joke, you know, now that he is retired, with great skill and cynicism launched a drive against the Woodworkers union, in the process of which some workers were very seriously beat up. The RCMP was brought in, and in the process of a fracas an RCMPer was killed, and Smallwood, taking advantage of the situation, smashed the Woodworkers union and made a deal with the Pulp and Sulphite Workers Union to completely replace them. *(He)* brought in another union, a house-broken union which picked up and was used to destroy the Woodworkers drive. So, while this was going on, while they were talking about a non-class party, an open-ended movement which would be attractive to Liberals and Conservatives, there was a heightening of the class struggle, particularly on the union front in Canada. *(This was)* an important factor in the development of the whole thing.

I could go more into that, but I think I'll have to leave that. Now how did we see the development of the NDP? Well, of course we didn't see it as our party – we had no illusions of what this movement could be. But we saw it as a very promising arena of activity, where we could move in, where we could deepen the class consciousness of workers who were coming into this formation – where we would confront the labor brass and the CCF brass, who were attempting to capture this motion, this forward motion of the workers, and channelize it along safe, sound and parliamentarist, reformist directions. We saw that it was primarily necessary for the socialists to involve themselves in this movement and to go through an experience with the workers who were coming to this movement with high anticipation. And we threw ourselves into every process which was taking

afoot –which was taking place – to build this new labor party – to attempt to assure (that) it would take on a class-struggle character. We knew it couldn't be a revolutionary vanguard party. But we decided to project our ideas into this situation, to give it a revolutionary program, to permeate it with the spirit of our transitional demands.

Trotsky's views once again on the labor party in North America

In some ways, we saw it as affirming some projections that Trotsky made, away back in 1932. Perhaps some of you wondered about our attitude towards the writings and thoughts of some of the great Marxists. Well, we often *(kept)* in touch with them, because we want to learn about the experiences that previous generations have had, and which have been generalized by the great socialist thinkers. And I remember coming across this series of essays by Trotsky; in this case this is a series of conversations that Trotsky had with some of our American co-thinkers, when they were thinking in *(these)* terms back in 1932, a long time ago, about the possibilities of the development of a labor party in the United States. Trotsky carried on a conversation with some leading American socialists about it. And I think he projected about *(the process that—ed.)* he saw was actually taking place in Canada, some almost thirty years ago. He was talking about labor party formations. He said "must we join that broad labor party formation, or remain outside of it?" He said that's no more a question of principle, but of circumstances and possibilities. Then he goes on. He said "It is more and more evident that the possibility of participating in, and of utilizing, a labor party movement, would be greater in a period of its inception" – in the period of its beginning, "that is, in the period when the party is not a party, but an *(amorphous)* political mass movement – that we must participate in it at that time, *(and)* with the greatest energy, is without question – but not to help form a labor party that will exclude us, and fight against us, but to push the progressive elements of the movement more and more to the left by our activity and our propaganda."

So Trotsky speculates *(in)* his comments on the labor party, *(on)* certain conjunctural developments that could take place, and where revolutionary socialists would look upon the labor party as a big challenge, as an opening for them, for the revolution itself – quite different from the CCF experience which is, as I say – which was a barrier, developed as a barrier to the revolutionary vanguard forces, in its formative period. It only later evolved. Well, here we had, we thought, the challenge of a labor party which was going to give a whole lift to the left, and which we must welcome, *(in)* which we must participate even though it's not our party, but

a party which is going to become a party of the class, and going to become an important experience for this class as it goes through its struggles with the capitalist class.

So we started to talk about this, and we turned our paper over to a running discussion of all the problems of a labor party. Now unfortunately you can't all have a look at the paper – sometime later you might do it. I brought down some of the issues, and if you went through it, you could see that we started to – not only with that piece of speculation – we started to discuss all the nuances and moves that we saw. We started to develop a column on the New Democratic Party – the New Party as it was called – to discuss what was happening in the union movement, in the old CCF – what were the issues – where we started to put forward the views of left elements in both formations, started to generalize them, started to apply our program. We thought we had a very important role in this process. For one thing, if you recall from our last class, the scuttling of the CCF and the preparations for the New Party had a shattering effect on the old CCF left. If you recall, I gave considerable information about the development of the left in the CCF. When the Winnipeg Declaration was adopted, which finished with the Regina Manifesto and projected a reformist concept for a party of labor, (…) a fundamental change concept, there was a tremendous disillusionment among the broad elements of the CCF, and they were of considerable consequence. Many of them walked away, in utter discouragement and disgust. Others talked in terms of a split – you see the CCF still existed – and many of them talked in terms of a split.

I remember going out to B.C. at this time, *(when)* I made a tour of Canada, and our purpose was to re-orient the left to meet the challenge of the New Party. And I remember having some very intense and serious discussions with very important and valuable elements, particularly in the B.C. CCF. They had some concept that they could block the development of the New Party. Here they were on the West Coast, *(they'd)* gone through a considerable experience, at various times they had caucus formations in the CCF, and they were so disgusted that they thought it was necessary for them to not go through, along with the New Party, *(but)* to cut right across it, and to issue a clarion call from the outposts in Vancouver – particularly the Stanley Park club – and to re-build the CCF. That's how they saw it – many of them; or they thought they would use the CCF – but they thought they were going to give it the old radical content of the Regina Manifesto. It would have been a different movement; it would have been some kind of a centrist, socialist formation. These persons talked very seriously in these terms – important socialist forces *(they were).* So we tried to tell them what their responsibilities were, what their duty was, to the new radicals that

were coming on to the arena, and their responsibility to take on the CLC brass and the CCF brass, and try *(to)* launch this party on a much firmer, class foundation.

As a matter of fact, if you look, you *(will see that)* we made many appeals to them, we took them on, and here's one article we wrote *(in)* our mid-July 1961 paper, which was a direct appeal to the left who were disoriented and were not moving in any direction towards the NDP. We told them "the founding of the new labor party in Ottawa at the end of the month is the most important event in the history of the tumultuous struggles of the Canadian people; the most important event that has ever taken place in Canada." And this article talked about the profound struggles which had taken place in Canada – *(from the time of)* the Quebec shipyard struggles way back in 1741 – it tried to give a whole span, a panorama in a very short form, of the great pages, the great struggles, of the Canadian working people. And we said, "this is the most important of them all – the most important of them all – more important than the Winnipeg General Strike, more important than the rise of the CIO" – that's what we said. "With the development of the economy in the process of these conflicts, the working class has grown in numbers and in strength. At the same time, individuals and groups of individuals participants *(have)* assimilated the broad lessons of these conflicts and parallel ones in other sectors of the world, have attempted to give them greater consciousness and direction, and project the concept of an entirely new social order founded on public ownership of the means of production."

The LSA calls for a united front to fight for a socialist New Democratic Party

"No matter under what form these revolutionary socialists function, their primary purpose, what they have always looked on as the necessary first step, is the launching of the **whole** working class, and getting it moving forward as a class in the right direction. With the forming of the New Party, based on the trade unions, the primary organization of the working class, this aim is being realized – by the formation of the N.D.P."

So we talk about – "it's probable that the efforts of the left wing at this time to win the party to a class-struggle program and a socialist policy, will only be moderately successful. But the main thing is that now, following this convention" – which was going to take place in Ottawa a month or so later – "the working people of this country will be moving forward as a class, with a political party of their own. With that they

commence to learn how to combat the capitalist class and their political leadership." You see, we're talking about the experience of the whole class – we're not talking about the experience of a relatively small number of revolutionary socialists who are gathered in halls like this in various areas across Canada. We're talking about the mobilization of the class and the lifting of the class **higher**, the total class a few feet higher in their level of consciousness – that's what we said this party projects. Well, you can evaluate that; we will evaluate that together in a few minutes.

So we challenged all socialists to come into this party – that's what we saw as our responsibility. Of course, they didn't want us – the Coldwells, the Douglases and the others didn't want us, but we didn't determine our tactics and our attitudes with regard to their graciousness towards us! We've been fighting them for some time, and we were out here now for a much bigger fight, a much bigger fight. Now that the organized labor movement was coming into the formation of a labor party, we weren't going to be kept out. This was our responsibility and our task; this is the situation which we had been working for, in our own way, for many years, and we're not going to be deprived of our participation in it. And so we appealed to everybody to come in; we appealed to all formations, no matter what our attitude or relationship to them was on various fine points of socialist theory; we told them to come in, come in and build the socialist movement.

Now, at the same time, we launched a pan-Canadian political formation. We launched the League for Socialist Action. That may startle you – here we are telling everybody to "get into the New Democratic Party" but at the same time that we said that, we said you've got to build the League for Socialist Action – and we launched *(the LSA).* We fused the two major forces of the Canadian Trotskyist movement, the Vancouver formation and the Toronto formation; and we pulled them together and launched the League for Socialist Action. That's revolutionary politics. As we moved toward the formation of a mass labor party, (…) we said, the revolutionary socialists have to be able to meet this with an effective force, with a harmonious concept of what the task is – and we launched the League for Socialist Action. I don't know whether I should – yes, I'll just quote a few parts of it:

"Without such a consolidation" – we're talking about the consolidation of the socialists – "on a national scale, there can be no effective or consistent drive to keep the New Party moving toward the left and towards a socialist solution to the problems of this epoch. Without such a motion, and lacking a socialist perspective, the New Party will inevitably

disillusion its supporters and disintegrate. The prevention of such a catastrophe impels united action of all conscious socialist elements." So we tried to make the League for Socialist Action a focal point for the socialists – first with an effective appeal to them that they should come in, and they weren't going in without some kind of formation, without some kind of cohesiveness, without some kind of purpose. We didn't tell them to just go in, and do your own thing in this operation; you know, you're moving among some real sharpies and sophisticated maneuverers, as you will see when I tell you about the convention. We told them the socialists have to go in together, and they've got to go in with some common understanding of the tasks.

Now as much as I'd like to give you a summary of some of our basic ideas here, I don't think I'll take the time. We published a small pamphlet, a small brochure on "What the LSA is, and What it Wants" and we projected what the socialists should do in the NDP in that pamphlet, and what the LSA wanted to do in the New Democratic Party. It's all here, in the paper. I should say a few words about the NDP. On the eve of the New Democratic Party, we got the feeling of the times – there was a showdown that was being launched on a cross-Canada basis by the bosses against the labor movement. But there was a reaction by the labor rank and file. The labor brass got up and read the story's tale of what was happening at that conference I attended – in province after province, in wringing their hands, you see – but the rank and file wanted some action. And they saw the labor party as what they needed, to carry out a counter-struggle against the anti-labor drive.

There was a union convention in May 1960 – I just came across the report. There were 1600 delegates at this convention, and there was a labor party motion put before the delegates. "Everybody sprang to their feet" according to the reporters in *Labor Challenge*. "All the delegates sprang to their feet," and somehow the band started to strike up the strains of "Oh Canada." But soon that was overwhelmed by a tremendous force that everybody picked up – "Solidarity Forever." That was the theme – that was the response to the labor party resolution. And the resolution in essence instructed the top leadership to prepare for the founding convention.

Canadian Trotskyists campaign for the New Party to become the Canadian labor party

Now there was a big discussion taking place across the whole country. And as I say, we tried to pull it together. We made our own

statements, in the name of the League for Socialist Action, but we tried to pull together the statements of every other current or element in the whole process. I see there was always this big column *(in our paper—ed.)* "Around the New Party" and we discussed what's involved in the *(NDP—ed.)* constitution, *(and)* the problems of the party. There were conventions taking place; you see – the B.C., Alberta and other sections of the party were holding their conventions prior to the foundation of the New Democratic Party. And so we discussed the problems in an editorial "What's in a name?" where we said we want to call this a "labor party." You know it subsequently became known as the New Democratic Party. That was the most interesting debate. The leadership wanted to latch onto the Kennedy image. It seems ironical now for you and I to talk about Kennedy, a man who plotted the attempting squashing of the Cuban Revolution, the man who planned the Vietnam aggression – but he was a very popular figure – he was a new image. He preceded Trudeau, in Trudeau's best period of demagogy – and the New Democratic Party, and the Communist Party, all made great eulogies of Kennedy. And so they were talking about calling it the "Democratic Party," the name of a party of the bourgeoisie in the United States – the Kennedy party, you see.

So we made the case for a labor party; and we argued how important the name is, of a party – what it means. Well they thought it was important too, and they named it the "New Democratic Party" – they wanted to give it a left-liberal character. We wanted to give it a clear and incisive labor character and we argued for a "Labor Party" title (…) We argued the question of nationalization, we had big discussions on democracy, the key to the building of the new party, you see. Here's the B.C. labor *(and)* NDP adopting the idea of unilateral disarmament – we supported that, we wanted the party to come out against NATO and NORAD. The Alberta section of the party came out against NATO and NORAD, so we gave it a **big** play and tried to make everybody acquainted with that view, which was the view of an important sector of the party. And we carried on this continuous discussion, we had big articles – for a socialist party; how the party must commit itself to socialism. As I said, the Regina Manifesto committed the CCF to a new society, a socialist society. We wanted to have this party, regardless of anything else, to commit itself to a strategic concept of fundamental change – a new society.

And so there's a whole series of articles, scattered through the paper, on the problems of the party. Some of them big essays, which are going to be read only by a limited number of persons, *(and)* other reports of what was happening in various sections of the party and acquainting people to what was going on. Well, you can go through it yourself sometime, to see

how we tried to intervene in this process. For us, it was a life and death matter, a very urgent matter, that we should intervene in this process where everybody is thinking, talking, exchanging experiences and preparing to launch a new party – a very important formative period where big experiences are being had by the Canadian working class. So we turned the whole of *Labor Challenge* – that was the *Workers Vanguard* I think it was, at that time – that was *(its)* whole thrust – we intervened in a big scale.

There were other forces intervening as well of course, aside from the right-wing, trying to shape it into an all-inclusive party. There was the Communist Party – a rather interesting aside to the situation – they were against it being a labor party, very much opposed to it being a labor party. They expressed fear at the Mine-Mill convention of October '58 – the Mine-Mill was a union *(which)* the CP had major influence in and you could often follow what the position of the Communist Party was by following what the Mine-Mill convention did. They expressed great fear that the new party would be a farmer-labor party, in a resolution which they passed at their '58 convention. They want only "an alternative government;" that's what they said they want. In the *Pacific Tribune*, *(their)* top columnist, Howard Griffin, came out against a labor-based party. He wanted "a broader approach to unity." It wasn't broad enough that labor should be there, as a class formation; it had to encompass other forces; *(it was)* too narrow to be committed to labor – a key force in society. He wanted a "popular alternative," not a party. He didn't want a party. He objected to a party. Of course, the concept of a party *(puts it)* in conflict with other parties, you see – they didn't want a party, they wanted a coalition. A broad coalition of some kind, *(which)* would encompass all progressive elements – "broad concepts of unity," these are the phrases they are using in their articles. They wanted an "anti-American peoples' coalition that would encompass those capitalists who would put the interests of the Canadian nation before profit" *(laughs in the audience).* They've been looking for those capitalists, high and wide – this was their concept. They cut a thrust across the whole development of a labor party, and we took them on of course – we took them all on.

Now I want to get to the convention because time is going quite rapidly. An important convention, I think the most important mobilization of the broad forces of the Canadian people that has ever taken place, that has taken place so far. The *Workers Vanguard* had a very full coverage of it. We had a special issue, devoted entirely to the convention in which we covered every aspect and every phase of it, and it's well worth reading – it's the mid-August '61 issue, and I can only give you the slightest impression of it. There were 1800 voting delegates, 681 union representatives, they

represented 49 national and international bodies, there were 707 CCF delegates, and there were 200 delegates from Quebec, which itself was very significant. (...) We characterized that affair as the first mass labor party on the North American continent in a summary article – we said this was the first mass labor party formation to ever take place on the North American continent.

Challenging the liberal welfare-state policies of the NDP leadership

Of course it got under way with the welfare state concept – that's Mr. Douglas's concept. Mr. Douglas didn't talk in terms of the big changes that had to take place at all, in this country – he just wanted to establish a welfare state, he wanted more reforms. So that's what this party was – this party was essentially a party of pressure on the bourgeois parties – an independent party, but nonetheless essentially a party with a strategy of pressure on the bourgeois parties. It didn't project anything else than a welfare state. As a matter of fact, if you read through the statement of the New Democratic Party – and it's the official statement of the party today – this party does not mention socialism in its 28 pages of program. It doesn't even say the word, doesn't make lip service. You see, we've often complained about people who talk about socialism but do nothing about it; it's just so much lip service and token gesture – it's a Sunday occasion you know when they say something about the ultimate objective – but there's no relation between the current, day-to-day program of the party and the socialist objective. And we've tried, with our demands, to make a synthesis, to pull together, to interlock, the day-to-day struggles, and give them a socialist direction.

But we've complained about people who make just token gestures to socialism. Well the new party, the New Democratic Party, in its declaration of principles – its Statement of Principles – does not in 28 pages of type, say a single word about socialism – that's the official declaration of the party. (...) As a matter of fact it didn't even commit itself to an anti-capitalist program that would be capable of uniting the workers in struggle, in defense of their interests, or in extension of their interests. So *(it)* didn't project any fundamental change, had no anti-capitalist program, and its international outlook – it's world outlook – well, it boiled down to a big debate on one question, and that is as to whether or not Canada should be a part of the international imperialist conspiracy, namely in NATO/NORAD;

This was the subject of a big debate at the convention. And regrettably, this convention came out to commit the party, which it is still

committed to – to identification of the party with NATO/NORAD – there were a few riders to it but they didn't mean anything, everybody knew what the party's essential position was. The NATO debate was perhaps the most interesting one. As a matter of fact, Douglas managed to get himself elected as the president of the party, just in the process of the NATO debate. It started on one day, and then *(re-)* started on another day – there was a period in between, very convenient you see if you wanted to make some adjustments and jockeying. And Mr. Douglas got elected as the leader of the party before the NATO debate, although the NATO debate was the most important question. There were two contestants for the head of the party – there was Hazen Argue who opposed NATO and NORAD, and there was Mr. Douglas. But the debate on NATO and NORAD took place after the popular contest for the leader of the party. Mr. Douglas won the leadership of the party hands down. Now, when the question of the debate on NATO and NORAD took place, you'd think he might say, well, here I am the leader of the party, the parliamentary spokesperson of the party, so I will sit this one out, while the party decides its policy.

Not Mr. Douglas – he didn't do that at all, he did just the opposite. Having been elected overwhelmingly as leader of the party, he presented the party with the threat of a split, on the key debate on the question of NATO and NORAD. He got up – there was a big scramble for the mike, it is amusing how they manipulated it, it was quite cynical how they manipulated the process of debate. At any rate, Mr. Douglas ends up at the mike at a crucial period of the debate, and he puts his resignation on the table. He told the delegates that it would be impossible for him as leader of the party to carry a position against NATO and NORAD, so he put his resignation on the table. A tremendous threat to the party! Here's the party, just coming off the ground, challenging the people of Canada to rally their forces, you know, behind this party – this party's going to lead the struggle to a new society of some type – and the leader, in the midst of the convention, threatens the party with a split. Well, the party of course wilts under this pressure – the delegates wilted under the pressure. This was certainly the most scandalous, brazen, cynical manipulation of his personal prestige against the party's democracy. Well, the party came out in support of NATO and NORAD. *(This report)* is interesting; sometime you should read it.

Well, there was also a big debate on whether the party should commit itself to socialism – *(a key)* perspective, of course. It was a big question *(since)* the party's founding, where it's headed for – well, I won't go into that, it was a long debate – and the make-capitalism-work, welfare-state position won. *(Broken sound here at end of tape.)*

(Second tape:) (…) so what did the Trotskyists have to say after that? Well, we didn't change our appreciation of the significance of that Convention and the launching of the New Democratic Party. On the contrary we said what will happen is, the workers will have to go through some experiences in this party. We didn't make our evaluation of the significance of the development around specific incidents that took place at that Convention. We said "at long last the working class of Canada have a mass political party of their own. It is within this party, their experiences in struggle with the capitalist class and their political lackies in the Liberal, Tory and Social Credit parties that they will test the contending views, and through which they will forge the leadership which will construct a socialist Canada of peace and plenty." (…) we talked about the general significance and we also talked about the challenges before the left wing, before the socialists. There's a separate article on the balance sheet of the Convention from the point of view of the needs of the Left. We called upon the Left of course to organize behind the League for Socialist Action in the labor party, in the labor party itself. We didn't hide our existence – we moved in and we told people you've got to get in behind the League for Socialist Action and you've got to fight for a program such as we've developed.

We made some observations that the Left didn't have a common understanding of its tasks. It's viewed as diverse forces, of diverse experiences – it didn't have a program. The opposition of many of them to the reformists is limited, to an academic character – it doesn't flow over to other questions, particularly immediate issues of day-to-day concern. One thing that was startling was that socialists had nothing to say on the immediate issues of the day – they get up and said we have to commit ourselves to socialism, but they didn't have anything to say about housing, or about the wage struggle, or about the unions. They didn't have anything to say about any of the ongoing struggles which the mass was involved in. They weren't capable of developing a program. They did not constitute a consistent opposition to the Coldwell-Lewis leadership. Some of them, like *(Dorothy)*Thomas, one of the delegates from Victoria, on some of the most burning and immediate issues, are in solid agreement with the extreme right – they don't even pose an alternative leadership.

Many in this circle, instead of understanding the influx of the trade unions in the NDP as a promise of their future victory, equate the unions with the trade union bureaucracy. We still have these currents, you know, in the NDP (…) the labor brass replace for them, the *(whole)* union – they can't see the rank-and-file and they can't see the dynamic possibilities of the unions. Their socialism is a credo – not a guide to action. It's a socialism

purged of struggle and conflict – a disembodied idea, not related to any historic agency, such as the Marxists recognize – the working class of the advanced capitalist countries. And we developed some of our Transitional Program in an educational way. We said "they didn't pose an alternative to the reformist program of the CCF-trade union bureaucracy." We said "in that party the struggle is going to take place. The revolutionary vanguard is going to be built in the process of that struggle." What was lacking – here we were, the revolutionary socialists intervening in the debate as best they could, commenting on the problems, the challenges of the party, trying to develop and apply socialist concepts to programmatic issues – but what was lacking was, not only the fewness of numbers of the Left as a whole, and the incohesiveness and lack of unity of the Left – what was lacking was a revolutionary cadre. The forces of revolutionary socialism, the forces that were in the League for Socialist Action, were very, very small (…) And we attribute the failure of the revolutionaries to take advantage to the full of the opportunities that existed with the formation of the New Democratic Party to the weakness of the revolutionary cadre.

The weakness of the Left at the NDP founding convention

I went down to that (NDP) Convention and I went around – I was trying to get other people to do things – people who we were trying to work with, who had no background, no experience. You know, we were even working with Hazen Argue *(who contested the leadership of the New Party.)* Hazen Argue was one of the members of parliament from one of the Western prairie seats. Shortly after the Convention of the NDP he went over to the Liberals! But he was a leading spokesperson of the Left – he was the symbol of the Left at that time. So you see what kind of forces we were having to play with. This big challenge came out of the political arena in Canada, and the Left was without real forces to work *(with – we)* couldn't even find a credible leader. I must say, Argue was open to many suggestions – many propositions he carried as best he could, I suppose – the struggle on NATO. But he was a very weak reed, and his defection was by no means accidental. We were *(also)* working with *(Douglas)* Fisher at that time. At that time within the framework of the NDP he was a bit left – this is the fellow who became a *(Toronto) Tele(gram)* columnist, whom I saw on TV the other night, playing a stooge game against the trade union leadership on the right to strike! You see, these elements were playing a certain role at that time, by mere fact there were no other forces to work with. The revolutionary socialists, you could count them at that Convention on two hands – that's what you could count them on – and they were trying to intercede in this situation, trying to utilize what was at their disposal.

Okay, so we have the formation of the party. Well, the failure of the party to adopt a revolutionary perspective, the failure to come out against war, against the NATO alliance, to project an alternative foreign policy for a party in power in Ottawa – didn't dim the hopes and aspirations of the rank-and-file. There was a whole period following that Convention of great enthusiasm among the ranks of the working class. New young workers came into the NDP – not a overwhelming number, but a considerable number. There was a great anticipation of new forces, that this party was going to do something big. And that carried forward for some while in the Left. But it gradually dissipated (…) against the realities, against the fact the party was already under the control of the leadership of a closed-knit bureaucratic element, primarily the trade union brass and the old CCF brass. And of course they interpreted the program with the mandate, the formal mandate of the Convention – and of course as they usually do, often in violation of whatever mandate (…) came out of the Convention. As you know, the people who run a parliamentary party are not the delegates who come to a convention every once in a while – but it's the parliamentary caucus that runs the parliamentarist socialist formation – the reformist formation.

So, the leadership of course were trying to change the relationship of forces in the party, trying to cool it, trying to capture, to cap it, and of course they went about the process of transforming it from what some people say *(should be)* a movement – the concept of a movement – broad, open, moving, flexing – into a political machine. That was the first task *(because)* for them, that's what you got to do – you've got to translate *(support)* into votes, right now, as fast as you can – got to translate it into votes. And so they started to cap this whole process. But the party moved forward electorally, because it had a qualitatively different base. The ebb and flow of the CCF which I talked about at the last class, was much (…) more unstable, much more unstable. But with the New Democratic Party we can say that the base of labor consciousness in Canada with that experience prior to, during, and subsequently after the New Democratic Party – the involvement of the trade union movement laid a much more firm base behind the concept of independent labor political action. And I just pulled together a bit of record on the stability of the party. I won't go into it, because I'm told I'm now overtime. But the party is qualitatively more stable than the CCF.

Of course they moved in on us as fast as the could, against the genuine Left, the socialist left, and in about three years, we had the old rigamarole of expulsions, harassment, denunciations of radicals, of left-wingers. It started off with the expulsions of youth – the New Democratic

Youth in British Columbia – then the expulsions in Ontario, the whole group of the New Democratic Youth, and then, very shortly of course we had the formation of left-wing caucuses. There was an organized left wing developed in British Columbia and there was also one in Alberta – the Woodsworth-Irvine Fellowship. By 1963, the League for Socialist Action was following all these developments as an active participant in them – not as an academic observer – *(and)* came to the conclusion, by 1963 at their Convention, that the period of mobility of the party, that period when the party could have taken on generally a revolutionary dynamic – that period ended by 1963. That was an evaluation of the NDP. Along with that, something new was taking place – primarily the subject of the next lecture. That new phenomena, when new opportunities were opening up for the revolutionary socialists outside of the NDP and independent of the NDP. The NDP in this period did not reflect the new radicalization which we prophetically commented was on the rise, by as early as 1958, *(when it)* came up to the NDP during the foundation of the party. Then the party became more and more an electoral machine, became less and less attractive to the new radicalizing elements. And these radicalizing elements were increasing in their breadth and in their numbers. For instance there was the crisis of the Communist Party, a very important problem for the revolutionary socialists. How can they take advantage of the new crisis that hit the Communist Party, which rendered it asunder, with the defection of all the top leaders of this party with the Hungarian uprising. This was a new challenge for us. There was the antiwar movement unfolding – starting to develop, broadening and increasing among new layers of youth, radicalizing youth, against the war in Vietnam, and against Canadian complicity in the war in Vietnam.

That was taking place outside the NDP – oh, it found its reflection in the NDP, but it was taking place outside the NDP. Generally those new radicals looked upon the NDP, even after such a short time, they tended to see it as a reformist party, not a revolutionary party. The new radicals thought of themselves as revolutionaries – not Trotskyist, not Marxist-Leninist – they thought all the "Old Left" was passé – but they considered themselves revolutionaries, and they weren't attracted by the parliamentarist, reformist, trade-union bureaucratized, CCF-bureaucratized, new party formation. There was a (…) new rising radicalization taking place in Quebec – it was taking place outside the NDP. It came up to the NDP at the New Party *(founding)* Convention, but the NDP wasn't capable of responding to it – didn't respond to this. And so this radicalization became a new and a very important challenge to the left. What did the revolutionary socialists have to say then, in that case? We said the New Democratic Party is no longer the big radicalizing factor for new elements who are capable of

becoming revolutionary socialists. Its part of the whole radicalizing experience of the class, but there's an unevenness developing in the radicalization process, and the revolutionary movement must find cadre. That was what was wrong in 1961, at the time of the founding of the *(New)* Party – the revolutionary socialists didn't have cadre – so we desperately learned that lesson and we knew we had to get cadre. Where is the cadre? Well, it's a long haul in the New Democratic Party. (*That)* was very apparent at that time, with the New Democratic Party being quite insensitive to the new radicalization, *(as)* there were new elements coming into the struggle. We decided that we had to become part of that struggle – we **were** part of it – we were never outside of it. We – (end of tape)